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Dreaming of New Realities in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass, A Harem Girlhood*

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“Dreaming of New Realities in Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass, A Harem Girlhood*”

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Abstract

In this thesis, I aim to analyze and place Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, within the broader scholarship of feminist thought in the Muslim-Arab world and the global understanding of gender dynamics. As one of the most prolific and magnetic scholars, authors and feminists, Fatima Mernissi's books, papers and stories are published around the globe. However, her personal semi-autobiography, *Dreams of Trespass* and the contradictory themes it presents has largely escaped in depth analysis by feminist scholars of the Muslim-Arab world. After establishing comprehensive backgrounds of different previous Muslim-Arab feminist methodologies used to analyze Mernissi's works, the histories of Egypt and Morocco during the 1940-50s (the time of her childhood) and the context of the harem, I use literary analysis and hermeneutics to explore how Mernissi presents her experience and contradictory understanding of the harem in *Dreams of Trespass*. I assert that her goal in writing this book is to present her contradictory reality of the harem as both allowing for women's resistance and perpetuating the restraints of the harem. As she reclaims not only her experience, but also the experiences of the women in her harem, this is justified within the paradigm of Islamic feminism, qualified by the small *i*, because it allows women to proclaim the validity of their empowerment within their perceived realities.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to the legacy, inspiration and life of Fatima Mernissi. In being able to explore her works, her life and the tensions she analyzed in depth as a Moroccan Muslim woman, I have only scratched the surface of her intelligence, empathy and incredible ability to tell stories. Because of her, so many women, including myself, have found the courage to raise their voices for the recognition of their experiences, who they are and what they care about. For this, we are eternally indebted to Fatima Mernissi.

Je voudrais aussi dédier cette thèse aux toutes les femmes du Maroc. Si je pouvais écrire en Arabe, je l'écrirais pour cette partie, à connecter plus à cette communauté. Néanmoins, cette thèse cherche à continuer l'héritage de Mernissi, dans l'inspiration, la provocation et l'ouverture du dialogue des expériences pour les femmes musulmanes ou du monde Arabo-Musulman.

Enfin, je veux dédier mon travail à ma maman marocaine, Mama Rokaya. Elle m'a montré en réalité, en conjonction avec les idées de Mernissi, les manifestations infinies d'une femme marocaine sincèrement forte et auto-proclamée. Vous m'inspirez tous les jours et j'espère que vous pouvez le lire un jour inshallah.

Introduction

Fatima Mernissi is not only one of the most influential scholars, sociologists, writers and feminists of the Maghreb, Muslim and Arab world, but analysis of her works opens doors to understanding ever changing gender dynamics. In Morocco, her work targets issues pertinent to the intersections of the Moroccan and Muslim woman, beginning with her earlier sociological works of rural and urban Moroccan women. Arguably her most famous work, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, placed her scholarship within works examining the intersection of Islam and its relation to the structure of Muslim society. The majority of her scholarship examines these dynamics with scientific and sociological methods, where she builds her analysis on a direct analysis of holy Islamic texts, their interpretations and social dynamics. Despite this contribution, Mernissi's fictionalized semi-autobiography *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, is her first work in which she does not directly formulate hypotheses, examine, or use traditional forms of evidence to support her statements. I will unpack her goal in writing this book, the intended or unintended effects on her audiences, and where it belongs in the scholarship of Muslim feminist schools of thought. As *Dreams of Trespass* renders a rare window into her personal life through her reflections of her childhood, it belongs within in the islamic feminist school of thought, Raja Rhouni's prescription to the established Islamic feminism, because of its ability to support Mernissi's presentation of the harem as a multi-lateral construct of empowerment and restraint.

Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood was written in 1994, a pivotal time in Mernissi's career as it marks her transition from employing secular feminist analysis to Islamic

feminist analysis.¹ Set in Fez, Morocco in 1940, Mernissi tells the story of her childhood within a harem, her interactions with the women of the harem, and life inside. The chapters are structured around themes Mernissi deems essential to her experience and the different ways she grapples to identify the formulation of her identity. These themes manifest in Mernissi's presentations of the female characters living in the harems, storytelling in multiple modalities, influences of Egyptian feminists and women, and the harem itself in different forms. The primary characters Mernissi discusses are the women in her Fez harem and her grandmother Yasmina's farm harem: her mother, her Aunt Habiba, cousin Chama, Yasmina, and Yasmina's co-wives Tamou and Yaya.

Mernissi skillfully weaves the themes of the harem, storytelling, and the women in the harems to present the layers to her childhood as she experienced them, paralleling her reflections as an older woman. Ultimately, her use of these themes creates a contradictory understanding of the Moroccan woman in her experience as both restrained and empowered. Mernissi's reflection as an older woman contrasted to her narration as a young girl, reveals the mindset the harem constructs, but also the forms of power and resistance the women were able to express within. Her narration as a child paints the circumstances as she believed them; thus, empowering the women's forms of expression and resistance within their reality. However, in her own commentary on these circumstances and reactions, Mernissi addresses the restrictions the harem inflicted within the identities of the women in her life. Mernissi captures the importance of presenting her contradictory past, in a quote from another one of her books: *Islam and Democracy* as she states: "Our liberation will come through a rereading of our past and a

¹ Raja Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima, Mernissi*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

reappropriation of all that has structured our civilization.”² Therefore, Fatima Mernissi writes *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* to claim those contradictory forms of existence and resistance the harem imposed upon her and the women within, by highlighting the ways she perceived these women transcending their restrictions.

I first delineate the field of Muslim feminist theories, Mernissi herself as a scholar and feminist, and feminist histories of Morocco and Egypt; followed by my analysis of the themes within the book. I will provide background of secular, Islamic and islamic feminist thought to illuminate their intertwined histories and provide context to why I place *Dreams of Trespass* within the islamic feminist paradigm. In delineating literature of Islamic, islamic and secular feminisms, I utilize the perspectives of leading experts, scholars and feminists: Leila Ahmed, Margot Badran, Miriam Cooke, Amina Wadud, Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Raja Rhouni, and Mernissi herself. I use this foundation to explore critiques of Mernissi’s other works while identifying the presence and lack thereof of *Dreams of Trespass* in these critiques. Additionally, a historical background section, “the harem” and feminist histories of Morocco and Egypt provide historical context to my argument. This leads to the literary analysis where I present evidence chosen from the text to show how the narrator’s interactions and understandings of the harem depict Mernissi’s experience in the harem: as both empowering and restricting. Thus, *Dreams of Trespass* deserves analysis and critique within the feminist scholarship of the Muslim-Arab world to further explore her role as a Moroccan Muslim feminist and scholar.

² Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, (Perseus Publishing, 2002). 160.

Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi is one of the most influential and thought-provoking feminists, writers and sociologists in her contributions to global feminist thought, and thus her history must be addressed. She is reputable for her charisma, candor, strength and determination, but also for her ability to revisit women's experiences in Muslim societies throughout different stages of her life. Not only this, but she has inspired and provided a voice to Moroccan women and many women, Muslim or not, around the globe.

Mernissi was born in Fez, Morocco, one of the largest, most ancient, and historically educational cities, in 1940. After Morocco gained its independence, she attended Mohamed V University in Rabat and then Sorbonne in Paris. She received her Ph.D. from Brandeis University in the U.S., where she wrote the thesis that later became her first book, *Beyond the Veil, Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (1976). She taught sociology at Mohamed V University and continued her sociological research at the Moroccan Institut Universitaire de Recherche Scientifique. Her career as a sociologist, writer, novelist, artist, and feminist produced multiple, critically acclaimed books: *Beyond the Veil, Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (1976), *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (1984) under the pseudonym Fatna A. Sabbah, *Veil and the Male Elite – A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1987), *Islam and Democracy, Fear of the Modern World* (1993), *Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1997), and *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2002) along with numerous essays and short stories. She is hailed as one of the first, most prominent and unprecedented Moroccan scholars and feminists in the Muslim and Western world alike, winning the Prince Asturias Award for Literature in 2003. She died in

Rabat on November 30, 2015 leaving a legacy of illuminating, analyzing, and inspiring growth within the Moroccan and Arab-Muslim women's struggles, triumphs and feminist movements.

Limitations

This thesis is limited by the small lens a literary analysis presents. I base my analysis on a text written as a fictionalized autobiography, thus analyzing a text whose elements may be purely fiction in nature. This can limit the depth of this analysis but also introduces this analysis for future work within the nuances of islamic, Islamic and secular feminist scholarship.

Additionally, as there is not much literature surrounding islamic feminism, I ground my analysis in the writings of scholar Raja Rhouni. This may inhibit the accuracy of analysis I can utilize in describing the exact place *Dreams of Trespass* finds within it. Despite these limitations, the analysis of this book is essential not only to the understanding Mernissi as a Moroccan feminist scholar, or to the understanding of different Arab-Muslim-Maghreb feminist schools of thought, but to reshaping understandings of power in gender dynamics by introducing an existence of multilateral comprehensions of agency.

Methodology

This thesis attempts to add to existing literature critiquing Mernissi as a Moroccan feminist and scholar, but also to the scholarship within the broader Islamic, islamic and secular feminisms. First, I delineate methodologies used in the past to analyze Mernissi's works; secular feminism and Islamic feminism. The introduction of islamic feminism allows for critique of *Dreams of Passage* through literary analysis, particularly examining Mernissi's tone, choice of narrator, language, and symbolism of characters in conjunction with the islamic feminist paradigm. To do this, I use islamic feminist hermeneutics to examine the language within the framework of islamic feminism, further elucidating how Mernissi's intentions and presentation

do not fit within the other frameworks of secular and Islamic feminism in her goal to redefine her experience to the world. By providing in the following sections comprehensive discussions of secular feminism, Islamic feminism and the birth of Islamic feminism, I conclude that the analysis of Islamic feminism most reconciles and embodies the message of *Dreams of Trespass*.

Secular Feminism

Feminism in the Muslim world is not monolithic. However, it emerged as a singular strand in the first few years of the nineteenth century in the Middle East and North Africa, influenced partly by nationalistic uprisings against colonization. Egypt being at the forefront of the movement experienced two major events marking women's progress, in conjunction with strong nationalist movements, within the years 1907-1912. The first was Nabawiyya Musa became the first Egyptian woman to obtain her secondary-school certificate, despite facing sexist discrimination from school administrators.³ The second was Malak Hifni Nassef published multiple articles speaking out against women's injustices in *Al-jarida*, the newspaper of the liberal secularist Umma party, under the pseudonym Bahithat al-Badiyya (Seeker in the desert).⁴ As they were the first women in Egypt to enter the public spheres of media and education, their actions define the goal of secular feminism, articulated by Huma Ahmed-Ghosh: "Secular feminists...base their rationale for women's rights on a human rights discourse to enable and empower the individual in a secular democracy to create a civil state."⁵

Seen in Egypt, as it was a leader of the feminist movement in the Muslim-Arab world, the relevancy of the secular strand manifested in the creation of feminist associations, attending

³ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 117.

⁴ Ibid. 171-172.

⁵ Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9, no.3 (2008: 106).

schools, publishing writings in journals and participating in political events linked to the Egyptian nationalist movement. However, other Maghreb/Muslim-Arab countries in the early 1900's made secular feminist advancements as well, as Ahmed states: "Tunisia, Syria, and Iraq, did introduce measures to render polygamy and unilateral divorce more difficult."⁶ In contrast, she remarks that Egypt only approached reforms of this nature in 1927, when draft legislation to restrict polygamy and male right to divorce was approved.⁷ Therefore, the spread and intensity of the secular feminist movement varied among Muslim-Arab countries.

Critique of Secular Feminism

Despite the revolutionary sentiment of this movement, many find fault with the framework secular feminism operates within. Within her chronology of feminism in the Middle East/Maghreb, Ahmed exposes a major problem with secular feminism as: "[a] dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself with the westernizing, secularizing tendencies of society, predominantly the tendencies of the upper-middle class, a feminism that assumed the desirability of progress toward Western-type societies."⁸ Rhouni also elucidates a problematic aspect of secular feminism as insisting, "upon the implementation of gender equality in the public sphere while acquiescing in the notion of gender complementarity in the private sphere or the domain of the family."⁹ This highlights the inability of the secular school of thought to address the patriarchal construction of the family by only arguing for egalitarian recasting of Muslim personal status or family law.¹⁰ However, the secular feminist paradigm opened the space for

⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 174-175.

⁷ Ibid. 175.

⁸ Ibid. 174.

⁹ Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid. 4.

women in the public sphere in Muslim majority countries, leading to the discussion of how this sphere should be.

Islamic Feminism

Muslim feminist voices began to diverge in the early 1900s, beginning with Egypt's Huda Sha'rawi and Malak Hifni Nassef. Leila Ahmed explains how after secular feminism's voice became recognized, "the second remained an alternative, marginal voice until the last decades of the century, generally not even recognized as a voice of feminism."¹¹ That generally unrecognized voice is Islamic feminism. However, in the postcolonial Muslim nations, Badran describes how, "It [Islamic feminism] developed as a response to the rising Islamist movements, which had become more and more vocal in Muslim majority societies."¹² Additionally, Rhouni quotes how Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini identifies this new battle for Muslim women as, "...between tradition and modernity in which Muslim women are still caught, [Islamic feminism] must be conducted in a religious language and framework".¹³ Ahmed describes how due to these circumstances, Islamic feminism "searched [for] a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within the native, vernacular, Islamic discourse – typically in terms of general, social, cultural, and religious renovation."¹⁴ Thus, Islamic feminism found its place by utilizing a religious framework and language to give power to women in varying social and cultural aspects as well.

¹¹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 174.

¹² Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 26.

¹³ Ziba, Mir-Hosseini, "The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought: Strategies for Reform," *Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World* 1, no. 1, 2003), 644.

¹⁴ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 175.

Critique of Islamic Feminism

The main criticism of Islamic feminism is that the identification is oxymoronic. Miriam Cooke, a prominent scholar of women in the Muslim world, summarizes this viewpoint from scholar Haideh Moghissi's argument: "The Qur'an, for Moghissi, is unequivocally opposed to gender equality and the Shariah¹⁵ is not compatible with the principles of equality of human beings."¹⁶ Further, Moghissi asserts that to celebrate an Islamic feminism is to

highlight only one of the many forms of identity available to Middle Eastern women, obscuring ways that identity is asserted or reclaimed, overshadowing forms of struggle outside religious practices and silencing the secular voices which are still raised against the regions stifling Islamification process.¹⁷

Similar to Moghissi, Islamic scholar Fatima Seedat states: "Islamic feminism, as an analytical construct claims Muslim women's struggles (historically and presently), and furthermore from the potential Islamic feminism holds to erase the differences between Muslim and other women's struggles for equality."¹⁸ This valid and shared fear of the erasure of women's intersectional experiences within different Muslim majority countries, is addressed when Cooke points out that Moghissi compounds Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Cooke articulates Islamic feminism differently than solely asserting a religious identity as a form of liberation for women. She describes Islamic feminism as not a coherent homogenous identity, but, "a contingent, contextually determined strategic self-positioning."¹⁹ She states: "The label

¹⁵ The Islamic Supreme Council defines Shariah as "the Islamic Law – the disciplines and principles that govern the behavior of a Muslim individual towards his or herself, family, neighbors, community, city, nation and the Muslim polity as a whole (Ummah)".

¹⁶ miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 57-58.

¹⁷ Ibid. 58.

¹⁸ Fatima Seedat, "Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism: Between Inadequacy and Inevitability," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 29, no. 2 (Fall 2013), 27.

¹⁹ Cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, 59.

Islamic feminist brings together two epithets whose juxtaposition describes the emergence of a new, complex self-positioning that celebrates multiple belongings.”²⁰

Rhouni explores deeper problems with Islamic feminist methodologies. She states her issue with the core pillar of Islamic feminism: reinterpreting verses of the Qur’an to, “...invest them with more modern and more egalitarian meaning, and that resorts to a historical and contextual reading when no progressive meaning can possibly be invented.”²¹ She problematizes this method of contextual analysis while also highlighting that because of the androcentric language within the Qur’an, she, “...cannot adhere to an easy, naïve discourse that declares Islam or the Qur’an as feminist, or that gender equality is normative in the Qur’an.”²² She instead asserts that “The Qur’an remains a book that incites the search for justice and social transformations,” but one that, “is not a repository book of law that feminists can easily use to advocate women’s rights.”²³ Ali, in *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, backs this claim by arguing: “we need to defend the necessity of equality as a component of justice, not simply assert it as Qur’anic. Simplistic invocations of justice and equity in the Qur’anic text are insufficient.”²⁴ Islamic feminism raises questions pertaining to the relationship between women’s progress and the roles of Islam and Qur’anic texts as a framework for interpretation; in giving voice to or restricting women.

²⁰ Ibid. 59.

²¹ Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 13.

²² Ibid. 13

²³ Ibid. 13-14.

²⁴ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 149, 150.

Theoretical Framework: islamic feminism by Raja Rhouni

Rhouni offers another paradigm of analysis: ‘islamic feminism’ qualified by the small *i*. ‘Islamic’ as opposed to ‘islamic’ delineates an essentialism to “Islam” by restricting analysis solely to the Islam experience, and, “serves to operate the polarization Islam/Orient versus West/secular/democratic/modern.”²⁵ Rhouni uses the adjective ‘islamic’ instead of ‘Islamic’ because there is “nothing inherent in it” as she believes, “there is no such thing as a monolithic ‘Islamic paradigm’ or an ‘Islamic methodology.’”²⁶ She further highlights islamic feminism’s immunity to issues she exposes within Islamic feminist methodologies: the crosspollination with other religious feminisms, seen in scholars Amina Wadud and Sa’diyya Shaikh’s borrowing of reading tools from modernist scholars of Islam, secular feminists and biblical feminist scholars. By borrowing methodologies from other religious feminisms, the paradigm “Islamic feminism” contradicts itself by using analytical tools historically and religiously outside the sole Islam experience. Thus, under the non-essentialist qualifier ‘islamic’, Rhouni argues that the possibility of comparative feminist hermeneutics is justified. This further highlights the fluidity of this paradigm as she states: “writing from an islamic feminist position does not disqualify one from writing from a secular position, as shown in Mernissi’s work.”²⁷ Thus, I will use Rhouni’s islamic feminism to examine *Dreams of Trespass* because of its ability to interact both within and outside the frameworks of Islamic and secular feminisms, and its goal of expanding the narrative of feminism that aligns with the inability to conform *Dreams of Trespass* to any one school of thought.

²⁵ Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 36.

²⁶ Ibid. 35.

²⁷ Ibid. 37.

Literature Review: Previous Critiques of Mernissi

Mernissi's works contribute to secular, Islamic and Islamic feminist discourses, as she personifies "the evolution of feminism from a movement premised on the rejection of the status quo to one of accommodation and reform."²⁸ Many scholars coin Mernissi as the first Islamic feminist, although she did not explicitly use this term to describe her work or herself. The only scholar to fully examine Mernissi specifically within these paradigms is Rhouni, who presents Mernissi as a multi-front feminist. She states that Mernissi's work "transcends the disciplinary boundaries of sociology, the initial domain of her academic formation and incorporates the closed domain of religion and experiments with fiction."²⁹ She builds a repertoire of Mernissi's secular feminist critiques, beginning with her early sociological works providing voices to the economically disadvantaged rural and urban Moroccan women. Rhouni categorizes Mernissi's *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*, written under the pseudonym Fatna Aid Sabbah as secular feminist critique because of its contribution to the re-writing of Moroccan history through the viewpoint of the "sub-altern Moroccan female" – the woman not included in the writing of history. She delineates these works as secular because Mernissi targets the political and civil actors of colonialism, nationalism, and the postcolonial state as well as Marxism, feminism and their roles in forming the "Moroccan woman."³⁰ Rhouni looks at Mernissi's works *L'Amour dans les pays musulmans*, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, and *Islam and Democracy* as incorporating both secularist and Islamic feminist sentiments, and ultimately argues that Mernissi begins to form a "new theoretical path that bridges the two approaches."³¹ However, Mernissi is

²⁸ Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Women's Rights in the Muslim World: Reform or Reconstruction?" (Third World Quarterly, 27, no. 8, (2006), 1482.

²⁹ Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 39.

³⁰ Ibid. 40.

³¹ Ibid. 39.

most identified by many of the Arab/Maghreb/Muslim world as one of the first and most prominent Islamic feminist scholars, particularly for her work *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society*.

Mernissi is widely considered the first to produce an Islamic feminist text beginning with her work *Le Harem Politique* in 1987.³² Moroccan scholar Abdellah Labdaoui was one of the first to identify Mernissi as an Islamic feminist, by devoting a chapter of his book to her: ‘Mernissi et le feminism islamique’ (Mernissi and Islamic feminism).³³ Mernissi’s works also receive criticism within the Islamic feminist framework. Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon in *Production of the Muslim Woman* argues: “Mernissi reproduces the Islamist originary narrative locating the origin of culture and civilization in the early years of Islam.”³⁴ Zayzafoon’s argument is shared by scholars Barlow and Akbarzadeh, who analyze Islamic feminists in their study. They state that Mernissi’s approach resulted in the “reinforcement of those traditional patterns of authority that are undeniably patriarchal, antidemocratic and unrepresentative.”³⁵ Further, Moroccan anthropologist Naima Chikhaoui critiqued Mernissi by pointing out that, “Mernissi’s second-stage [Islamic] feminism [is] ‘soft,’ in contrast to her earlier more radical secular feminism.”³⁶ As Mernissi receives criticism from both Islamic and secular feminist schools of thought, her inability to be categorized under any one form of feminist thought continues in analysis of *Dreams of Trespass*.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. 5.

³⁴ Ibid. 3.

³⁵ Ibid. 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

The Gap in the Literature

Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood was published in 1994 directly within Mernissi's ideological shift, thus escaping analyzation from scholars of both Islamic and secular feminist frameworks. As Rhouni points out, Mernissi covers incredible intellectual ground, from her sociological work with rural Amazighe women to analyzing democracy's compatibility with Islam, but her own autobiography has hardly been acknowledged or analyzed. This major gap in the literature is fascinating as it not only highlights a shocking lack of analysis of the life of Mernissi, but also of her reflections within the book after a Western education and academic establishment in sociological and feminist scholarships. Even Rhouni only mentions *Dreams of Trespass* briefly, to discuss how Mernissi: "targets Western and local myths of the harem and harem women in a gesture of double-front critique."³⁷ The double critique pertains to the use of Islamic and secular feminism also categorized by Moroccan author Abdelkebi Khatibi as her, "multiple-front analysis, which is another aspect of her secular or unorthodox critique."³⁸ However, the islamic feminist paradigm offers an extension of the multi-front analysis to a self-constructed analysis, which I will use to examine a more encapsulating understanding and reconciliation of *Dreams of Trespass*.

The Harem

The term harem historically produces inaccurate stereotypes, misconceptions and associations that must be debunked and redefined. Common Western misconceptions associate the harem with Muslim practices, but historically harems existed in pre-Islamic civilizations of the Middle East. These harems were mainly in royal courts and consisted of the ruler's wives,

³⁷ Ibid, 46.

³⁸ Ibid.

concubines, female attendants and eunuchs.³⁹ The harem is also traced to the sultan's harem in Imperial Turkey and the Ottoman empire, where writings of Western encounters with the harem consistently orientalized and eroticized the women and interactions within. However, Leila Ahmed provides a definition of the harem within the historically modern Muslim context: "The harem can be defined as a system that permits males sexual access to more than one female...[or] as a system whereby the female relatives of a man – wives, sisters, mother, aunts, daughters – share much of their time and their living space."⁴⁰ This description identifies the harem of Mernissi's childhood: the families of her father and brother residing together in the harem. This form of harem was common in mainly middle-upper class Morocco until its independence from France in 1956, and although once commonplace in middle-upper class Egypt, disappeared due to persistent nationalist and feminist forces against British occupation in 1910-1920.

Non-Western feminist scholars expanded on the harem's capacities to empower and restrict women, while exposing the inability of Western feminists to address the harem and recognize its nuances within the cultural context. In Leila Ahmed's autobiography, she discusses the work of prominent Women and Gender Studies scholar and professor Chandra Mohanty:

Harem is perceived by Western feminists as the site of oppression of the colonized Muslim women...In a number of Western radical and liberal feminist writings, Mohanty detects the so-called "colonialist move" which consists of producing the "Third World" woman as a singular and monolithic subject.⁴¹

³⁹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Harem," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified March 2, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/harem>.

⁴⁰ Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," *Feminist Studies*, 8, no. 3, (1982), 524.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 48.

Ahmed, in agreement with Mohanty, delineates how Western feminism's misplaced understanding and ignorance of others' experiences perpetuates the harem as a place of oppression, sexual exploitation and eroticism. Further, she outlines how the problematic view of Western men, historically reproduced through writings, paintings, photographs etc., further ingrained the misrepresentation and orientalizing of the harem:

Reading early Western accounts of the harem, that in permitting males sexual access to more than one female, the system often but not invariably elicited from Western men pious condemnation for its encouragement of sexual laxity and immorality. But it was the second aspect, that women being freely and continuously together, and the degradation, licentiousness and corruption that must inevitably ensue which Western men viewed with considerable fascination.⁴²

Thus, the harem became a tool of eroticization and orientalizing for the West, characterizing harem women singularly by their sexuality and restraint. More notable, is how Western men used their eroticized understanding of the harem, to justify their morality and righteousness but at the same time fetishize the harem and those within it.

A global response from Muslim feminists is to portray the power the harem provides for women. Ahmed states: "The very word 'Harem' is a variant of the word 'Haram' which means 'forbidden' and also 'holy', which suggests to me that it was the women who were doing the forbidding, excluding men from their society and that it was therefore women who developed the model of strict segregation in the first place."⁴³ Also seen in Mernissi's portrayal of the harem Ahmed describes it as, "Here, women share living time and living space, exchange experience and information, and critically analyze – often through jokes, stories, or plays – the world of

⁴² Ibid. 524.

⁴³ Ibid. 529.

men.”⁴⁴ This presents how the reclaiming of the harem as a sacred space for women is essential to the identity Mernissi grapples with in *Dreams of Trespass*.

Historical Overview: Morocco during 1940's-50's

Morocco experienced extreme change and conflict during the 1940's-50's, the time period of Mernissi's childhood. Although Mernissi's Morocco was a French protectorate, this time marked the growing presence of nationalist sentiment and movements. As Morocco grappled with its identity, a wave of Arab nationalism also swept through the Middle East in Egypt, Lebanon, and Algeria. In November 1943, Lebanese nationalists declared Lebanon independent and Algerian nationalists released their own independence manifesto and Reform Plan that inspired the Moroccan nationalists Ahmed Belafrej, Omar Abdeljalil, Mohammed El-Fassi to draft Moroccan independence plans. In 1944, the Istiqlal (Independence) party was established and published their independence manifesto listing the following demands: an independent Morocco under Sidi Mohammed⁴⁵, allowing Sidi Mohammed himself to negotiate independence, Morocco's participation in the peace conference and signing of the Atlantic Charter; and allowing Sultan Mohammed V to establish a democratic government.⁴⁶ Following negotiations between Moroccan nationalists, the French and the Spanish, Morocco gained its independence from France in April 1956.

Within French colonial rule and nationalist movements, Moroccan feminist sentiment also emerged. Morocco along with other Middle Eastern and Maghreb nations under colonial rule followed the growing trend of Arabization, nationalization, and establishment of feminist

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Sidi Mohammad ben Yusef became Sultan Mohammed V after the independence of Morocco from France.

⁴⁶ Richard Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History*, (C. Hurst, 2000), 256-266.

movements. The coupling of nationalist and feminist movements in Egypt under British colonial rule, seen in *Dreams of Trespass*, became an early model for the Moroccans and other Muslim nations. As discussed above, within the Middle East and North Africa, two feminist movements emerged – secular and Islamic feminism. In Morocco, the secular feminist trend began in conjunction with the nationalist trend in 1946 with the creation of “Akhawat Al-Safaa,” the first women’s association spearheaded by the Moroccan urban elite women. This was the environment Mernissi grew up within, a newly growing feminist sentiment and the presence of a platform to which she would contribute to, in the Second (1980’s-90’s) and Third Wave (2000’s-present) feminisms.⁴⁷

Historical Overview: Egypt during 1940’s-50’s

Although Egypt is not completely comparable to Morocco, the juxtaposition of the two in Mernissi’s book reflects its influence. Margot Badran in particular, analyzes in depth the Egyptian spearheading of nationalist movements and Egyptian feminist thought. Urban, colonized Egypt birthed feminist consciousness within the 1880s with the emergence of upper/middle class women’s literary expression against the domestic harem and wearing of the veil. The time within the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s revealed the first organized feminist movement, al Ittihad al-Nisa’I al Misri (The Egyptian Feminist Union), founded and led by Huda Sha’rawi in 1923. The movement for Egyptian nationalism, in turn, helped spur the integration of Egyptian women into the public sphere – through schools and founding of Egyptian nationalist feminist groups and movements. Badran states: “Egyptian women’s feminism and nationalism and Egyptian men’s liberal nationalism signaled a united nationalist front during the

⁴⁷ Fatima Sadiqi, *Moroccan Feminist Discourses*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014).

independence struggle.”⁴⁸ Through this front, The EFU led demonstrations, strikes and demanded agendas to be recognized while advocating for liberation from Britain. Egypt’s first feminist consciousness developed far before that of Morocco, signaling the stark contrast between those Moroccan women residing in harems in 1940’s Morocco, and in the same year, the street demonstrations of Egyptian women.

Literary Analysis: Mernissi’s Contradictory Representation of a Moroccan Woman

Although Rhouni understands *Dreams of Trespass* as a demystifying text providing direct perspective to the life of the Moroccan harem woman during this time,⁴⁹ this section of the thesis exposes how Mernissi presents the women and herself in contradictory ways. These contradictions in light of writing of the book in English and employing narration of her younger self, paralleled by commentary of her older self, raise the question: does Mernissi’s presentation of her childhood aim to educate, demystify, or critique her experience in the Moroccan harem? I break down the literary analysis into examinations of the two harems presented by Mernissi, four women from both harems and the interactions she has with them, her representation of the role of Egyptian women, and the function of storytelling. Thus, Mernissi employs each with a goal of illuminating the multiple layers to women’s agency and restriction within her experience as a young girl. I will use ‘the narrator’, ‘the young narrator’, ‘the child’, or ‘the girl’ to refer to young narrator Mernissi, and ‘Mernissi’ to refer to her as an author, or her reflective commentary.

⁴⁸ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 74.

⁴⁹ Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist*, 46.

The Harem

Mernissi uses the harem to frame the social dynamics of gender in Morocco and the duality of its nature for herself and the harem women in her text. To do so, she parallels her harem in Fez with the rural farm harem of her grandmother Yasmina, to generate a stark contrast that also underlines their identical and pervasive natures of control.

The Fez Harem

The young narrator presents a conflicting understanding of the harem within the first few lines of the book. She explains that the harem represents the *hudud* or sacred frontier which delineates the limits of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden).⁵⁰ Importantly, as the narrator learned from her father how these frontiers protected women from trespassing and crossing limitations, she learned this also applied to the “other”. She recounts her father explaining: “the frontier protected cultural identity and that if Arab women started imitating European ones... there would only be one culture left.”⁵¹ Further, as Morocco was under French colonial rule at this time, the harem: “protected us from the foreigners standing a few meters away, at another equally busy and dangerous frontier – the one that separated our old city, the Medina, from the new French City, the Ville Nouvelle.”⁵² The narrator presents the *hudud* of the harem as necessary to protect her and her people from dangerous intrusion by the “other”. She further describes her harem as at once defining and protective:

First, there was a square and rigid courtyard, where symmetry ruled everything. Even the white marble fountain, forever bubbling in the courtyard center, seemed controlled and tamed... And finally, you had the sky – hanging up above but still strictly square-shaped, like all the rest, and solidly framed in a wooden frieze of fading gold-and-ocher geometric design.⁵³

⁵⁰ Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, (Basic Books, 1994), 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 180.

⁵² *Ibid.* 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 5.

This description describes the continuity, unquestionability and protective nature that the harem represents for the narrator. She presents the harem as rigidly symmetrical and clearly defined, illustrating the role of the harem within her life and the others who live there. Her symmetrical characterization of the harem manifests in a binary reality of men versus women, outside versus inside, dangerous versus safe. The narrator's description of the fountain as "forever bubbling" indicates the infinite defining of physical space and social order by the harem. Finally, she describes the sky, an unending large entity, as visible but "strictly" and "solidly" framed. The narrator's construction of the sky's relationship with the harem, mirrors the reality of those within the harem: being able to relate to the outside world or the "greater entity", but within strictly and tightly regulated conditions. This is essential, as the child provides descriptions of the harem outlining its constrictive nature, not critically, but in admiration of the beauty and safety the harem institutes.

The Farm Harem

In relation to her descriptions of the Fez harem, the way the narrator describes the farm harem displays her inconsistent understanding of the role of the harem. She emphasizes how she considers the farm harem of her grandmother Yasmina as much more liberating and free spatially than her Fez harem. Despite this, she inadvertently utilizes the same language of symmetry, definition and barriers to describe the farm harem:

The right side of the house belonged to the women, the left to the men, and a delicate two-meter high bamboo fence marked the *hudud* between them. The two sides of the house were in fact two similar buildings, built back to back, with symmetrical facades and roomy arched colonnades...The gardens were surrounded by high delicate wrought-iron grilles with arched doors that always seemed closed, but we only had to push at them to get onto the fields.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid. 50.

The young narrator's language indicates the farm harem's similarity to her own in structure, but underscores what she understands as spatial differences in freedom, equality and possibility. However, her descriptions of the farm harem continues to invoke sentiment of symmetry and rigidness as the sides of the house are split as male and female, with a "delicate" frontier between them, and the houses are "built back to back" with "symmetrical" facades. This language conjures imagery of a man and woman standing back to back, even with a thin barrier between them, revealing her perspective of the farm harem as defining the spaces of men and women. In addition, this harem is markedly different from Mernissi's in its internal structure: existing of one man with multiple wives instead of two families, adding to the confusion of different liberties and constraints. Despite this, she explicitly states: "There were really no limits to what women could do on the farm. They could grow unusual plants, ride horses, and move freely about, or so it seemed. In comparison, our harem in Fez was like a prison."⁵⁵ This commentary from the child adds to her confusion with the role of the harem, as she understands the farm harem to define gender dynamics but to also allow more physical freedom. Ultimately, the narrator's contrasting of two different types of harems highlights how different manifestations of a pervasive construct define space, gender interaction, and the outside world. Although manifested differently on the farm harem versus the Fez harem, the narrator describes these boundaries as accepted and even necessary to define her understanding of Moroccan social spheres.

The Women in the Fez Harem

Although the narrator implies that her harem is more physically restraining than the farm harem, she persistently highlights the contradictory forms of agency the women employ within

⁵⁵ Ibid. 55.

both harems. She defines power for the harem women by exploring their restraints, but also its role in allowing different modes of finding meaning, strength, support and inspiration from one another. The girl presents two important women from her Fez harem, her mother and Aunt Habiba as powerful models who exercise these specific forms of expression and individuality, despite the constraints imposed by the harem.

The narrator consistently describes her mother as a figure aware of and vocal against her confinement within the harem. A powerful example of this is how she depicts her mother openly critiquing the value of certain practices in the harem, such as the practice of eating all meals together. The child explains, “the entire idea behind the harem was that you lived according to the group’s rhythm. You could not just eat when you felt like it.”⁵⁶ However, she identifies how her mother finds ways to disrupt this rhythm as, “...sometimes, she would skip it [lunch] altogether, especially when she wanted to annoy Father, because to skip a meal was considered terribly rude and too openly individualistic.”⁵⁷ The narrator depicts the delicate balance her mother seeks to navigate in expressing her dislike for her restraints without crossing boundaries that define her existence. She praises her mother’s modes of circumventing the harem’s rules, while underlining them as solely reactions against those very rules. These acts of skipping meals are forms of expression, but do not allow for her mother’s creation of a new rhythm for herself or her family. Her mother encapsulates the narrator’s first contradictory representation of the women in the harem and their forms of resistance, by describing her ability to express discontent with her restricted life but being unable to create a new life.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 78.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 76.

The narrator depicts her mother in another dimension, adding to the conflicting understanding of women's agency, by simultaneously praising and objectifying her mother's sensuality as a form of resistance to the harem. This is seen in an example of a rare outing for the women of the harem and their excitement in being allowed to go to the movies: "Mother would spend hours and hours putting on her make-up and curling her hair in an incredibly complicated fashion."⁵⁸ Once at the movies, the narrator describes how her Mother and teenage cousin Chama transform: "...their hands were free, and sensuous perfumes were floating provocatively in the air around them."⁵⁹ To the narrator, entering the world outside the harem walls represents an opportunity for her mother to express her physical beauty, however, she also remarks how her mother must put on the veil before leaving the harem. This signifies a continuation of contradictions the narrator institutes. She portrays the harem as restricting her mother's ability to fully express herself, however, also juxtaposes this to the image outside the harem of the hands waving free, and sensuous perfumes wafting, as a romanticized empowered description. She praises how her mother circumvents the veil and harem, yet describes her as an object for observation and pleasure, again highlighting the contradiction: both constrained and free, sensual and objectified.

The narrator's portrayal of Aunt Habiba represents a different mode of interaction within the same construct of the harem. Aunt Habiba is a divorcee, thus she must live in her brother's (Mernissi's father's) harem. Importantly, many of the descriptions of Aunt Habiba portray how her shameful divorced status produced sadness and isolation. Although the child understands

⁵⁸ Ibid. 117.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 121.

Habiba's reality as seemingly hopeless, she praises Habiba's resiliency in her acts of rebellion against the harem. In an example, she paints a scene of Aunt Habiba:

... absorbed in her embroidery, her head bent over her *mrema*, a horizontal wooden frame used for elaborate projects... Aunt Habiba was stitching a green bird with golden wings all by herself. Big birds stretching out their aggressive wings were not a classical design, and if Lalla Mani ⁶⁰ had seen it, she would have said that it was an awful innovation, and one that meant its creator had flight and escape on her mind.⁶¹

The narrator's commentary in this scene elucidates her simultaneous understanding of strength within the pervasive restrictions of the harem. She states: "[Habiba] reassured me about the future: a woman could be totally powerless, and still give meaning to her life by dreaming about flight."⁶² The child describes romantically what she views as expressions of elegant resistance and power; particularly by equating Aunt Habiba to a bird who could 'dream about flight.' She romanticizes Habiba's trapped bird qualities as beautiful and inspiring, highlighting how the pervasive mindset of the harem institutes the finding of beauty and inspiration in restraint. The narrator describes Aunt Habiba as one who accepts her fate but continues to rebel through limited modes of self-expression, highlighting her restraints as with the embroidery of a bird, when she herself cannot fly. Therefore, she presents the contradiction in her simultaneous emphasis on Aunt Habiba's shameful status within the harem and her reverence and respect for her aunt as a strong and resilient individual.

The Women in The Farm Harem

The contradictions delve deeper, seen in the narrator's descriptions of the women on the farm harem as interacting in less restrictive ways due to the lack of physical walls. When describing her grandmother Yasmina, she explains: "[Grandfather] had always found Yasmina to

⁶⁰ Lalla Mani is Mernissi's traditional and conservative paternal grandmother.

⁶¹ Ibid. 153.

⁶² Ibid. 154.

be quite eccentric and had in fact needed a long time to get used to some of her habits, such as climbing up trees and hanging there for hours at a time...But what always saved Yasmina was the fact that she made Grandfather laugh.”⁶³ These descriptions of interactions on the farm harem reveal the narrator’s view of the farm harem as a more relaxed social setting, allowing the ability to “climb and take tea in trees”, contrasting drastically to her mother’s self-expression in eating meals out of the Fez harem’s rhythm. Despite this, the child describes how, “Yasmina herself had to share Grandfather with eight co-wives, which meant she had to sleep alone for eight nights before she could hug and snuggle with him for one.”⁶⁴ The manner she describes the structure of the farm harem exposes the way she as a child learned and viewed restrictions not concerning walls, within the harem. Although the narrator views Yasmina as having more freedom than the women in the Fez harem, her notation of Yasmina’s sharing of her husband inevitably reveals another manifestation of the restraints of the harems and her contradictory understanding of them.

The narrator also describes Yasmina as being a main family member to delineate to her the function of the harem, providing insight to the roots of the contradictions. In one account, she credits Yasmina with explaining the farm harem to her as: “part of Allah’s original earth, which had no frontiers, just vast, open fields, without borders or boundaries and that I should not be afraid.”⁶⁵ However, in another interaction she recounts Yasmina saying: “The farm was a harem, although it did not have walls... Wherever there are human beings, there is *qa’ida* or invisible rule. If you stick to the *qa’ida*, nothing bad can happen to you.”⁶⁶ The *qa’ida* Yasmina describes,

⁶³ Ibid. 31.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 34.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 25.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 62.

refers to the social rules and constructs which place men in power of deciding the roles of women. The child grapples with this as she responds: “the *qa'ida*, the invisible rule, often was much worse than walls and gates. With walls and gates, you at least knew what was expected from you.”⁶⁷ She recognizes the internalization of these ideas: “If Yasmina’s farm was a harem, in spite of the fact that there were no walls to be seen, then what did *hurriya*, or freedom, mean?”⁶⁸ Here, the narrator identifies these contradictions that formulated Moroccan social construction, reflected in Yasmina’s teachings of the harem. In identifying the simultaneous comfort the boundaries provide by dictating her role in society, with the discomfort at the absence of these boundaries as at the farm harem, she highlights the underlying construct to the harem of the *qa'ida*, invisible rule. In commenting on these contradictory definitions, the narrator further exposes how the women within her experience were conscious of this contradiction but were limited in their expressions of this understanding.

The narrator provides a different angle to this contradiction with the arrival of a woman named Tamou, from outside the harem and of a different ethnic and socio-economic class. She describes Tamou as coming alone to the farm harem to ask for help, from the Rif mountains in the North, where her people were continuing to fight the French, “long after the rest of the country who had given up.”⁶⁹ Mernissi’s description of Tamou’s arrival underlines another representation of a Moroccan woman completely outside the norms and *qa'ida* of the farm and Fez harems.

She had appeared that morning wearing heavy silver Berber bracelets with points sticking out, the kind of bracelets that you could use to defend yourself if necessary. She also had a *khandjar*, or dagger, dangling from her right hip and a real Spanish rifle that she kept hidden in her saddle, beneath her cape. She had a triangular-shaped face with a green

⁶⁷ Ibid. 63.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 63.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 51.

tattoo on her pointed chin, piercing black eyes that looked at you without blinking, and a long, copper-colored braid that hung over her left shoulder. She stopped a few meters from the farm and asked to be received by the master of the house.⁷⁰

The narrator's description highlights powerful characteristics of Tamou not shared by any other woman in her life. As she creates an image of Tamou as fearless, commanding, and alone in a foreign part of the country, Tamou represents a stark contrast for the narrator to the women residing within the harems and the *qa'ida*. However, the narrator describes that in order to be received into the harem for help, Tamou must, like the other women, submit herself to the *qa'ida*, marry Mernissi's grandfather and become a part of the farm harem. The callous manner in which the narrator mentions this exchange reveals the banality in the act and idea that Tamou must bend to the limitations of the *qa'ida* and harem, despite her existence being completely contrary to what the harem represents. This adds to the narrator's contradictory representation of Tamou; strong, powerful, and unconventional, but still having to submit to the norms of the *qa'ida* and harem. Thus, this analysis of the narrator's descriptions of these four women of the Fez and farm harems, exposes her contradictory expressions of them, inadvertently highlighting their restraints, while praising their abilities to find agency in their own unique ways.

Egyptian Women Celebrities

The narrator utilizes Egyptian women celebrities and their influence on the women in her Fez harem to highlight the role of the women in constructing and perpetuating the limitations of the harem themselves. She demarcates chapter 12, "Asmahan, the Singing Princess" and chapter 14, "Egyptian Feminists Visit the Terrace" to portray how the women in her harem use the act of taking on the lives of the Egyptian celebrities through plays, as means to empower themselves.

The Egyptian women she specifically references lived within the years of 1850 to the 1940s,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

ranging from actresses and singers to activists and feminists. The ones mentioned most frequently are Asmahan, a Lebanese actress who moves to Egypt, Oum Kelthoum, an Egyptian singer and “symbol of the nation”, Aisha Taymour, Zaynab Fawwaz, and Huda Sha`raoui; Egyptian feminists and activists. The narrator explains how her Fez harem puts on plays of the Egyptian women’s lives and watches films starring Egyptian actresses, as forms of resistance to their confinement. This portrayal by the narrator provides a platform for another form of contradiction: the women in the harem’s acting out the lives of women who advanced women’s rights in Egyptian society, but within the walls of their harem.

Interaction with Egyptian Women Celebrities

In chapter 12 titled *Asmahan, The Singing Princess*, the narrator describes how her older female cousin Chama, conceptualizes and directs these plays using the younger girls as actors to perform for the other women in the harem. She describes these plays as a source of information of the lives of the revolutionary Egyptian feminists, activists, actresses, and singers as well as entertainment for the women in the harem. The main celebrity the harem adored and put on frequent plays of was Asmahan. The narrator describes the captivating power of Asmahan within her harem:

Even better was when Chama’s magic fingers captured the ravishing voice of Princess Asmahan of Lebanon, whispering on the air waves, “Ahwa! Ana, ana, ana, awha!” (I am in love! I, I, I am in love!). Then the women would be in pure ecstasy. They would toss their slippers away and dance barefooted in procession around the fountain, with one hand holding up their caftans, and the other hugging an imaginary male partner.⁷¹

The girl explains that Asmahan was a Lebanese woman who came to Cairo in the 1930s where she, “thought that a woman could have both love and a career and insisted on living a full conjugal life while at the same time exploring and exhibiting her talents as an actress and

⁷¹ Ibid. 104.

singer.”⁷² The descriptions above encapsulate what Asmahan represents, that attracts the young narrator and the women in her harem: sensuality, love, and freedom. The narrator romanticizes this scene of her harem’s interaction with the song of Asmahan, in which the women express their desire for an “imaginary male partner” in “pure ecstasy”. The language she employs reveals the women’s own orientalized and objectified view of themselves and what they are missing within the harem, as inspired by the song. In this way, she not only presents the contradiction by juxtaposing the women in the harem to the life Asmahan lived, but also her internalization and participation in the romanticizing of freedom in relation to love and sensuality, thus maintaining the constructs of the harem.

The narrator also explicates how films with Egyptian actresses are another medium through which the women of her harem project their desires and constraints. She describes her mother’s imitation of the Egyptian actress Leila Mourad who played the femme fatale in a film they loved, in a scene that would make “everyone burst out laughing”:

...she [Mother] whispered in a conspiratorial tone: No men can resist my awesome beauty! A single eye of contact, and innocent victims will fall wriggling on the ground. There is going to be manslaughter in the streets of Fez today!⁷³

The child describes how this act of imitating the Egyptian “femme fatale” figure empowers the women in her harem in portraying the power sensuality exercises over men. However, this adds to the contradictory representation of the women in her harem as these women are unable to act in these ways, and the closest they can get to the “femme fatale” is through the imitation of the acting by Leila Mourad. The narrator continues to build upon her conflicting representations in the actual plays the women in the harem put on of specific Egyptian feminists’ lives.

⁷² Ibid. 106.

⁷³ Ibid. 121.

As she discusses the singers and actresses, the narrator depicts the Egyptian feminist Huda Sha`raoui as particularly fascinating to her harem: "Huda Sha`raoui, an aristocratic Egyptian beauty, born in 1879... bewitched Egypt's rulers with ardent speeches and popular street marches."⁷⁴ Her emphasis on Sha`raoui's beauty and aristocratic status suggests that the attraction to this play is not Sha`raoui's actions themselves, but the exemplar she represents as a beautiful, wealthy, and cunning woman, relating empowerment to beauty and status. However, the narrator explains how Sha`raoui led the first official women's street march against the British in 1919, and the prevalence of this scene in their plays. She describes: "...we loved the 1919 women's street march. A key moment in the buildup of Chama's plot, it allowed almost everyone to invade the stage...jump up and down, shout insults at imaginary British soldiers, and toss away their scarves, symbols of the despised veils."⁷⁵ Thus, what the narrator depicts as entertaining and exciting about the enactment of Sha`raoui's marches, is the ability to participate in shouting insults and tossing away scarves, emphasizing the inability for these women to partake in these actions in reality. These two elements of the plays the narrator depicts: the importance of Sha`raoui's status and beauty to the inspiration of the marches, and the active imitation of the marches by all the women in the harem, adds to the contradictory role the Egyptian women play in the harem; as providing models of resistance but also enabling mindsets of women's freedom as singularly tied to romance, sensuality and class.

The narrator further develops her presentation of how the harem relates beauty and status to empowerment in the women's reactions to plays about older Egyptian feminists. These reactions reveal how the women were not interested in the acts of rebellion that did not involve

⁷⁴ Ibid. 130.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 131.

love, sensuality and adventure. She describes how Chama's favorite *ra-idates* or pioneers of women's rights are: "Aisha Taymour, Zaynab Fawwaz, and Huda Sha'raoui", but in reflection, Mernissi plainly states: "The life of Aisha Taymour was the worst. Born in Cairo in 1840, all she did, nonstop until her death in 1906, was write fiery poetry against the veil."⁷⁶ Similarly, the women in the Fez harem commented on Zaynab Fawwaz: "From her harem, all Zaynab Fawwaz could really do was inundate the Arab press with articles and poetry, in which she vented her hatred of the veil and condemned the seclusion of women."⁷⁷ As these Egyptian women lived in similar seclusions and experienced restraints by the veil, it is puzzling that Mernissi and her harem did not find these women's lives and works inspiring. The narrator's reflection asserts that the Egyptian women's actions were unable to generate any impact of value to the women in the harem, without love, reference to beauty or adventure. Despite this, she and the women in her harem are unable to obtain or express these aspects either, highlighting the pervasive construct of the harem within the minds of Mernissi and the women, and their contradictory understanding of themselves.

The young child presents this puzzling paradox with her own paralleling of Asmahan and Oum Kelthoum. Mernissi reflects on how the women in her harem related to Asmahan more than Oum Kelthoum: "Oum Kelthoum thought about all the right and noble things – the Arabs' plight and their pain in a humiliating present – and gave voice to our nationalist yearnings for independence. Still the women did not love her the way they loved Asmahan."⁷⁸ Mernissi comments as a young adult on how the women were uninspired by Kelthoum, contrasting with their adoration for Asmahan, as the narrator describes:

⁷⁶ Ibid. 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 130.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 104.

...she dressed in low-cut Western blouses and short skirts ... [she] was oblivious of Arab culture, past and present, and totally absorbed by her own fatally tragic quest for happiness... All she wanted was to dress up, put flowers in her hair, look dreamy, sing and dance away in the arms of a loving man, who would be as romantic as she...⁷⁹

As Mernissi points out, Asmahan contrasts drastically with Oum Kelthoum, a woman who “did all things right and noble”, while the narrator consistently describes in depth, the women of her harem’s adoration for a romanticized figure who simply wanted to “sing and dance away in the arms of a loving man”. This juxtaposition of both the narrator and Mernissi’s explanations of this irreconcilable understanding, points to the choice the Egyptian women present to the women in the harem, and how their choice of expression perpetuates their limitations. The child explains why the early Egyptian feminists and Oum Kelthoum do not inspire the women of the harem:

the problem with feminists’ lives was that they did not have enough singing and dancing in them...the audience much preferred watching Asmahan or one of the adventurous heroines from *A Thousand and One Nights*. For one thing, those stories had more love, lust and adventure in them. The feminists’ lives seemed to be all about fighting and unhappy marriages, never about happy moments, beautiful nights, or whatever it was that gave them the strength to carry on.⁸⁰

Her Aunt Habiba further comments on what is missing from the narratives of the Egyptian feminists, within the public discussion: “Why rebel and change the world if you can’t get what’s missing in your life? And what is most definitely missing in our lives is love and lust. Why organize a revolution if the new world is going to be an emotional desert?”⁸¹ Thus, what the narrator portrays as inspiring and provoking to the women in her harem is not the Egyptian women’s act of resistance to shared experiences of oppression and restriction. Instead, the possibilities beyond what they have and can experience are what catalyze excitement and desire in the women of the harem. The narrator’s modifiers such as “dreamy”, “fatally tragic”, and

⁷⁹ Ibid. 105.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 132.

⁸¹ Ibid. 133.

“happiness” identify what young Mernissi and the women of the harem identify with, believe important to their identities, and desire outside of the harem. The juxtaposition of the women in the harem to the Egyptian feminists and the putting on plays of their lives highlights not only the women’s constraints by the harem and the narrator’s understanding of this, but ultimately the participation of the women in the harem in perpetuating this construction. This creates a contradiction as these women are aware of their constraining circumstances, but prefer to dream of a romanticized reality procured by their own idealized interpretation of other women’s lives, keeping themselves within their protecting walls of the harem.

Storytelling in the Harem

The Magic of Storytelling

The narrator’s use and portrayal of storytelling indicates what she and the women of the harems deem an undoubtedly powerful form of women’s expression within the harem. She presents not only the stories themselves as powerful and inspirational, but emphasizes the role of the storytellers within the harem as those with the ability to provide imaginative passage beyond the boundaries of the harem. Although the girl portrays the storytellers within the harems as powerful women, they also embody the depth of restrictions surrounding all the women within the harem, supporting her continuously conflicting presentation of the women’s existence in the harem in her experience.

She supports this contradiction in her demarcation of the role of the storyteller to two examples of storytellers, Aunt Habiba and Yaya, whom she offers as simultaneously the most oppressed and the most powerful women in the harems. Mernissi depicts Aunt Habiba as the storyteller within her Fez harem: “Upstairs was also the place to go for storytelling...That was where Aunt Habiba had her room, small and quite empty. Her husband had kept everything from

her marriage with the idea that should he ever lift his finger and ask her to come home again, she would bow her head and come rushing back.”⁸² This space for storytelling cannot be disconnected from Aunt Habiba’s static and isolated existence resulting from her divorced status, reinforced by the harem. However, the child underlines the importance and magic of her aunt’s stories to transcend this status as she explains: “So, on those graceful nights, we would fall asleep listening to our aunt’s voice opening up magic glass doors, leading to moonlit meadows...Her tales made me long to become an adult and an expert storyteller myself. I wanted to learn how to talk in the night.”⁸³ The young narrator finds inspiration in what she perceives as Aunt Habiba’s ability to transcend the limits of the harem, however she exposes how this power is also Aunt Habiba’s reaction to her limits, underlining the pervasiveness of the harem. The imagery of imagination’s power, paralleling the powerlessness of Aunt Habiba’s situation, forms Mernissi’s contradictory understanding of the limits and roles of the stories within the harem.

The other storyteller is Yaya, of the farm harem. The narrator describes Yaya as “the foreign black co-wife” who “was the quietest of the co-wives, a tall and lanky woman who looked terribly fragile in her yellow caftan...her favorite color was yellow – ‘like the sun. It gives you light.’”⁸⁴ She presents Yaya as another example of finding strength despite having lower status, as once Yaya was accepted into the harem by the other co-wives, “she promised to tell them a story once a week, describing life in her native village deep down in the South, in the land of the Sudan, the land of the blacks, where no orange or lemon trees grew, but where bananas and coconuts flourished.”⁸⁵ Although a foreigner to the land, language, and culture, the

⁸² Ibid. 17.

⁸³ Ibid. 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 54.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

narrator focuses on how Yaya's stories inspire and form relationships with the other co-wives. She describes this as a power, as the other co-wives come to value Yaya so much that they plant a banana tree for her "to feel at home on this farm."⁸⁶ The narrator portrays the magic of storytelling, "when the banana tree bore its first fruit... Yaya dressed in three layers of yellow caftans, put flowers around her turban, and danced away towards the river, giddy with happiness."⁸⁷ As the narrator paints this romanticized image of Yaya, she does not focus on the struggles of Yaya foreignness or her learning the rules of the harem and *qa'ida*. Instead, she focuses on how the power of Yaya's stories, as seen by the other women of the harem, conformed her to the harem by helping her find her place within and thus, happiness. This reveals the continuous contradiction of storytelling; heralded by the narrator and the women of the harem as a means to escape their restraints, but in actuality helping each woman find her place and happiness within the harem. Thus, this adds continued contradiction as the narrator sees the stories as a way of transcending the walls of the harem, but reveals how they are actually a method of finding one's place of acceptance within the harem.

The Heroines

Further, the actual content and characters in the stories are presented by the narrator as essential to her upbringing and understanding of self. The two stories the child emphasizes repeatedly are Scheherazade in *A Thousand and One Nights*, and the story of Princess Budur. Her fascination with the two heroines of each story highlight characteristics that she and the women family members regard as strong and empowering to women. In comparing *A Thousand and One Nights* to the Egyptian feminists, author Mernissi discerns: "Scheherazade's women of

⁸⁶ Ibid. 55.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

A Thousand and One Nights did not write about liberation – they went ahead and lived it, dangerously and sensuously, and they always succeeded in getting themselves out of trouble.”⁸⁸ Mernissi illuminates how the appeal of Scheherazade’s story originates in the ability to combine sensuality with liberation; underlining this desire of the women in the harem as seen in Aunt Habiba’s quote above. She further alludes to the problem she and the women of the harem find with the Egyptian feminists, in solely writing against the injustices they suffered, whereas Scheherazade “went ahead and lived it.” However, this juxtaposition the narrator sets up between writing against one’s problems and “going ahead and living” inadvertently categorizes her and the women within the harem as unable to do neither. Further, the girl describes what inspires her about Scheherazade in the story: “The king was about to chop off her head, but she was able to stop him at the last minute, just by using words.”⁸⁹ Scheherazade is understood by the narrator and the women of her harem as having the power in the story to control a man of authority and transform her reality. The contradiction reveals itself in the narrator’s depiction of the power of Scheherazade that the women in the harem identify, by simultaneously underlining those same characterizations unattainable to them. These characterizations of love, sensuality, cunning and adventure that the women in the harem find fascinating, which reflect what they cannot express in or outside of the harem, are also seen in the story of Princess Budur.

The story of Princess Budur describes a wealthy, beautiful woman travelling with her husband, described as ‘taking care of all her needs’. However, one morning the princess awoke alone and her husband could not be found. In order to protect herself from thieves and thugs, she dressed herself in her husband’s clothes, resulting in convincing everyone she was her husband, a

⁸⁸ Ibid. 133.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 10.

man and the prince of a kingdom. Mernissi states that the women in her harem: “cheered Princess Budur, because she dared to imagine the impossible, the unrealistic...In fact, her situation was really hopeless – she was stuck in the middle of nowhere, far from home...But when your situation is hopeless, all you can do is turn the world upside down, transform it according to your wishes, and create it anew.”⁹⁰ Mernissi’s reflection on the story parallels that of the power she sees in Aunt Habiba and Yaya as storytellers – the ability to transform a situation – to transcend the boundaries and create the reality they want as in Aunt Habiba’s stories and Yaya’s banana tree. However, her understanding of this story again underlines the inability for the women in her harem, particularly the storytellers, to transform their situations of hopelessness into those of agency and freedom. Mernissi’s conflicting equation of power and weakness, protection and restriction, activism and romance constitute how she and the women of her harem find value in their lives as women. Although contradictory, the narrator portrays how the women ultimately choose to an extent their own realities, despite their restraints, as a powerful and transcending act. However, her portrayal of this understanding to the realities of Moroccan Muslim society and the world, brings to light whether or not this power and transcendence exists as the narrator believed them to be.

Analysis

A Young Voice

Author Mernissi unapologetically uses the voice of her younger self to narrate the harems, the women inside the harems, and the stories and plays they interact with, re-creating the environment that founded her understandings. Primarily, providing insight as a child allots value and legitimacy to the experience of a child growing up in a harem, debunking Western beliefs

⁹⁰ Ibid. 133-134.

that women did not discuss, recognize, or resist their situations. However, at the same time, her utilization of the child narrator fully exposes the constructs she and the women of the harem lived in as conflicting and self-inhibiting. Mernissi as a child consistently points out the contradictory explanations the women in her life provide her concerning the role of the harem and the role of males and females. This juxtaposition of resistance and empowerment, mirroring the structure of the book, underscores a further effect from Mernissi's choice in narration: all the women in her experience understood this inability to reconcile their existence in the harems. Additionally, the child narration in conjunction with commentary from an older reflective Mernissi, distances her from those experiences and perspectives as ones she no longer holds, continuing to expose the mindset of internalized inferiority the harem and the broader *qa'ida* ingrained in all those inside. Despite this understanding of their situation, the women's choice to focus on romance, adventure, stories, and films that emphasize love and beauty, portray their own roles in perpetuating the constraining mindset of the harem. In identifying this, Mernissi aims to present another contradiction to the Western reader; of women who internalized their inferiority in their expressions of resistance.

The Mindset of the Harem

Using different modalities such as the plays of Egyptian women, the storytelling and her interactions with her women family members, Mernissi lays bare how as a young girl, these ideas of contradictory female existence in Moroccan Muslim society were normalized and perpetuated by the women themselves. In writing *Dreams of Trespass* in English before her native Arabic and French, she aspires to portray to a largely ignorant Western audience not only the complexities of her childhood harem, but how in her harem experience, the women found empowerment in ways that preserved the control of the harem. Mernissi as a child was taught to

believe that although the women in the harems suffered constraints of their sexuality, abilities to find love, and adventure within the harem, they could to a certain extent change their realities in the ways they wanted.

For a Western audience outside of the harem, the small acts of agency within the harems such as the planting of a banana tree for Yaya or changing of the meal time for Mernissi's mother are solely reactions to their restraints. However, Mernissi portrays these acts within the context of those harems as acts of resistance and agency. Other acts such as choosing to put on plays of Asmahan or Huda Sha'aroui instead of Oum Kelthoum or Aisha Tamour, highlight the women's choice of reality; to envision and participate in stories of love, adventure and sensual expression instead of marches or demonstrations. The stories of Scheherazade and Princess Budur that Mernissi presents as inspirational, celebrate the very act she considers the women in the harem as also partaking in; changing their reality. Mernissi presents this choosing of realities as only possible within the harem, which exposes the reality of their complete indoctrination by the harem mindset. Outside of the harem, their circumstances do not allow them to ignore and transcend their limitations in the ways they choose to do within the harem. Thus, child narrator Mernissi presents the women within the harem's construction of their realities as empowered in resistance, but her comments as the older Mernissi highlight the inescapability of the harem mindset in the perceived realities of resistance by these women.

The Western Audience

Mernissi's portrayal of her harems as a pervasive mindset that both constricts and empowers the women within, incites questioning of all restrictions within social structures and dynamics, particularly for a Western audience with little knowledge of life within Moroccan harems at this time. However, Mernissi's full exposure of the mindset the harem constructs, the

women's roles in perpetuating it, and forms of resistance formed within it claim this experience as solely for those women. In her descriptions of each woman, Mernissi explores how the harem imposes different forms of limitations upon each woman, subverting a binary or linear understanding of power and disempowerment in the harem. As women like Aunt Habiba, Yaya, and Tamou represent different women's demonstrations of limitations juxtaposed to strength, Mernissi opens understanding of power beyond both simple essentialist definitions of the women within the harem and those of the women's sole restrictions and oppression. Mernissi presents a form of resistance and power that she and the women in her harem value and strive for, that produces inspiration to dream a reality different from their own. This act in itself, directed at Western readers, presents a continuously powerful, inspiring and unique form of resistance to the harem that she and the women in the harem share in their experience.

However, Mernissi's experience within the harems does not represent much of the Moroccan experience during this time. Nor does she attempt to place her experience on a pedestal as the exemplar of the Moroccan woman's experience in the harem. On the contrary, harems were primarily of the upper-middle urban class, thus many women did not live within the harem, share experiences of putting on plays or telling stories, or have the luxury to attend the movie theater. Many women at this time worked strenuous jobs, had many children and no stable home. In this sense, the harem is a symbol of wealth and privilege in its ability to protect the family's women. Further, Mernissi's use of the Egyptian women models does not serve to compare different histories or manifestations of women's freedom and expression. She simply utilizes the interactions of the Egyptian women in her harem to demonstrate the ways the women in her harem perpetuated their own restrictions, but believed they were exercising free expression. Mernissi does not elucidate this to her audience as she does not attempt to explicate

or present all Moroccan women's experience during this time. Instead, she underlines the pervasiveness of the *qa'ida* and its different manifestations for only her experience and her female family members within their harems.

In addition, Mernissi's presentations of the women often romanticize and orientalize the environment and women within the harems, as this was her understanding as a child. She presents this to the Western audience to highlight how the women restrained in the harems come to understand their circumstances through romanticized and idealized modalities. In discussing difficulties women like Tamou, Habiba and Yaya experienced as a warrior fighting colonizers, a divorced woman, and a foreigner married into the harem, Mernissi does not delve into the details of their sufferings because as a child she was not told the details of these sufferings. To the Western audience this is meant to provoke; to highlight how in her experience, difficult circumstances and stories were learned in idealized, hopeful and romanticized terms. This is further seen in Mernissi's descriptions of the way the women themselves describe their experiences. They do not speak or tell stories about the difficulties of being divorced, or the unfairness of their situations within the harem. Instead, Mernissi portrays the women's dreaming of different realities through storytelling and plays as their way of dealing with taboo subjects, tragedy, and shame. The child narrator's descriptions of these idealized stories told with the aim of euphemizing a painful topic, displays the strength and value the women in the harem find in choosing to see their experience in hopeful light. However, read through the eyes of Mernissi's intended audience, the perpetuation of the harem by that very inability to discuss the extent and effects of their constraints in the harem, is highlighted. Despite this, Mernissi does not solely aim to pin the women of her experience as perpetuating their own entrapment. She seeks to

simultaneously, adding to her theme of contradictions, portray the women as claiming their limitations in their choice of self-expression and resistance.

Through islamic feminism

Within the paradigm of Rhouni's islamic feminism, Mernissi's presentation of her experience is neither empowered nor disempowered. She presents the restrictions and the forms of agency produced by the harem as interacting with one another on a spectrum, through which the women express their individual forms of resistance. This is valid in islamic feminist analysis, as it asserts that the ways Muslim women express their sexuality, find power and define themselves, are the ways in which they exist and have value. Although they derive power from Mernissi's portrayal of imagined realities such as the stories and the plays of the Egyptian women's lives, these are the realities that inform these women's understanding of self and themselves as Moroccan women. Thus, in the constructing of their own realities despite the underlying form of the harem, Mernissi presents the women in harems of her childhood as taking for themselves their internalized inferiority and claiming it as form of expression and resistance to the harem. islamic feminism allows this, unlike secular and Islamic feminism, because it opens the understanding of a Muslim woman's agency and expression to not be bound by essentialist understandings of Islam nor civil participation, but to the understandings and forms of power the women manifest for themselves; such as through modes of storytelling, plays, and the harem itself. Thus, islamic feminism is the only feminist analysis of the Muslim-Arab world that reconciles Mernissi's contradictory presentations of the women within her harems as forming their restrictions and realities, but also finding empowerment in their forms of resistance and expression.

Conclusion

Analyzing *Dreams of Trespass* is essential because it places Mernissi's own experience within the scholarship of feminisms of the Muslim-Arab world, provides important insights from a child's perspective on the spectrum of resistance and constraint the harem imposed, and expands the identities of the women in the harems negatively and positively. Mernissi's aim of this book is to portray her experiences as a young girl growing up in the harem, as both beyond the Western misconceptions and erotization of the harem and the Islamic and secular feminist discourses, which fail to reconcile the role of the harem as simultaneously empowering and restrictive. However, within the framework of Islamic feminism, Mernissi's subversion of normalized conceptions of power and restraint through child narration and expansion of the role of the harem and forms of resistance and expression it produced, in tender and respectful reflection, claims their entrapment and resistance experiences as belonging to solely those women. She writes to the wider Western audience to take ownership of her own experience; as a young girl and as a woman, and place it within the discourse of the different strands of feminism, nationalism and Arabization occurring throughout the Muslim-Arab world. In first claiming and presenting her experience in the harem as solely hers, including and highlighting all of its contradictions, love and hardship, she introduces to the world a novel understanding of not only her own experience, but the ways realities are experienced, the types of resistance they form, and the way forms of subalterity can be translated as power.

Thus, what Mernissi truly reveals in *Dreams of Trespass*, is the incredible power of narrative and the ability to transform circumstances to relations of power. Mernissi's child narrator provides direct insight to readers generally ignorant of Morocco or the Arab-Muslim world her perspective of women in the harem as powerful and able to transcend their boundaries.

This child narrator shows the readers how those within Mernissi's harem truly believed and lived this reality she describes – resisting, expressing, and being recognized by others in the harem, in their own unique ways. However, in the perspective of the older Mernissi, these forms of resistance and self-expression, while not disvalued in their importance or influence within the harem, reveal how outside the construct of the harem these acts are limited, reactionary to the harem, and disempowering. Mernissi presents the harem as a framework to transpose different narratives of resistance, expression, restraint and reaction as equally valid for those who lived and experienced each. As this is her experience and the reality which informed her conflicting views of power, women's expression and societal order, she exemplifies the ability to claim her story as hers only, re-writing and validating her experience in the harem. This underscores another aspect to the importance of this book – to establish for the global audience how her perspectives of her childhood have changed, how they can be reconciled through islamic feminism and the claiming of power within these perspectives. *Dreams of Trespass* provides a full circle in all dimensions, as in authoring this book, Mernissi embodies her own form of resistance and restraint to her experience by becoming the storyteller to reshape her romanticized but valid reality. Mernissi, as simultaneously a young girl, an older woman, a constricted child, an educated woman, within the harem and outside of it, transcends all boundaries separating one from the other, and creates a reality for the women within her harem and herself to exist as contradictory, hopeful, and powerful within the scholarship of gender dynamics globally and in Muslim societies. The analysis I present in this thesis places Mernissi's story of her life into academic scholarship which seeks to analyze feminism in the Muslim-Arab world, further underlining her goal in *Dreams of Trespass*: to present one's own experience, in all of its contradictory and confusing aspects, as valid. This technique ensures that within the realm of

international relations and feminism, the stories of individuals are not forgotten but are upheld as valid, to foster dialogues of confusion, open-mindedness, honesty, and conflict to continue transcending binary understandings of human experience and relation.

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